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SUBJECT: ARGENTINE DEPUTY DEFENSE MINISTER ON BILATERAL
RELATIONS, TRAINING AND PEACEKEEPING

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Ambassador discussed bilateral cooperation and training and Argentina's strong support for peacekeeping operations, particularly in Haiti, with new Vice Minister of Defense Alfredo Forti. Forti explained that the MOD is carefully evaluating the bilateral agreement on professional military education exchange (due for renewal) to make sure it meets the MOD's and services' current needs. He noted that the nine Latin American and Caribbean MINUSTAH-contributing countries had agreed to look at the creation of an association of peacekeeping training centers to better share experiences, best practices and, perhaps, form policy. Formation of the Argentine-Chilean joint peacekeeping force (Southern Cross) continues with the two countries dealing with interoperability challenges. A joint group plans to visit UN PKO in November to better understand UN standards and requirements. In a related matter, Argentina will be augmenting its commitment to Haiti, sending two Coast Guard (Prefectura Naval) patrol boats to Haiti as part of a six-nation maritime contingent assisting regional counternarcotics efforts. End Summary.

THE BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP

¶2. (SBU) Ambassador and EmbOffs met with new Vice Minister of Defense (actual title is Secretary for Military Affairs) Alfredo Forti and the Ministry's Chief of Cabinet Raul Garre on October 23. Ambassador commented on the vigorous state of bilateral relations, noting the recent visits of Argentine MOD delegations to Washington, D.C. of Argentine Undersecretaries Montenegro (Strategic Planning and Resource Management) and Bellagio (Education). Forti and Garre explained that the MOD was reviewing carefully all of its and the services training and education needs and agreements to try and bring them into line with the military's new doctrine and defense strategies, based on recent implementation of the 1988 Military Law.

¶3. (SBU) Forti explained that the MOD has outlined five broad areas of cooperation with the U.S.: strategic planning; defense resource management; reform of the professional military education system; science and technology and training and development of civilian personnel within the MOD.

PROFESSIONAL MILITARY EDUCATION

¶4. (SBU) The 10-year U.S.-Argentine bilateral agreement with the MOD, covering exchange of military exchange students, expires this year. Forti and Garre stressed their intention to renew the agreement but noted that they were looking carefully at the terms of reference and its scope and would likely be suggesting some amendments. They explained that

the situation is very different today and that there are new priorities not contemplated ten years ago. For instance, there were only three military education institutes ten years ago; now there are five. Education is limited to uniform personnel under the expiring agreement. They wanted to look at the possibility of including civilian defense personnel. They also want to focus strongly on planning, management, budget and resource issues. Garre stated that they want to look at military education issues and the possibility of the exchange of military health professionals. Garre also said they were looking at the reciprocity of the agreement to ensure equal treatment, particularly regarding the status of exchange students in the respective countries.

PEACEKEEPING AND SOUTHERN CROSS

¶15. (SBU) In response to Ambassador's recognition of and stated appreciation for Argentina's continued contribution to PKOs, particularly MINUSTAH, Forti explained that Argentina and Chile continue in their work to make the joint peacekeeping force (Southern Cross) operational. They are working on the many interoperability challenges from equipment and technology to doctrine and strategy. He said that a joint group will visit UN PKO offices in November to better familiarize themselves with UN standards and practices.

¶16. (U) Forti commented on the political and cultural significance of Southern Cross. He explained that 2008 marks the 30th anniversary of the Beagle Channel crisis, over which the two countries narrowly avoided going to war. Forti said they hope to have Southern Cross fully operation and ready to deploy in time for this significant anniversary.

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¶17. (SBU) In another new development, Forti outlined for the Ambassador plans to create a Latin American and Caribbean association of peacekeeping training institutions. He said that at the last meeting of the nine Latin American and Caribbean MINUSTAH troop-contributing countries, the MODs had agreed to support the Argentine/Chilean initiative to create the association to better share experiences, information and best practices. Eventually, the association could help coordinate policy issues related to PKOs as well. Such an association already exists in Africa, he explained. He also noted that the U.S. and Canada would be invited to participate as observers.

¶18. (U) Forti also commented briefly on the news that Argentina would be contributing two Prefectura Naval (Coast Guard) patrol boats to MINUSTAH. While the legislature has to approve the commitment, Forti said the political decision had been made. The idea of the two patrol boats is to join a 12-boat "South American" squadron focused on interdicting the burgeoning drug trafficking.

BIOGRAPHIC NOTES

¶19. (SBU) Forti is an articulate and open interlocutor with an extensive professional background as a political consultant throughout Latin America. Just prior to taking the position as Secretary for Military Affairs, Forti was Argentina's ambassador in Guatemala. He has a Masters in Public Administration from Harvard's JFK School of Government and an undergraduate degree in International Relations from American University's school of International Service. Forti, like many of his generation, is strongly affected by Argentina's "Dirty War." In 1977, at the age of sixteen, he, his siblings and his mother, were pulled off an Aerolineas flight scheduled to fly to Venezuela where Forti's father was already in exile. After one week in detention, the children were separated from their mother and dropped off in a Buenos Aires neighborhood. They never saw their mother again. Accounts indicate she was taken to a clandestine detention

center in Arenales, Tucuman, and apparently killed there.
WAYNE